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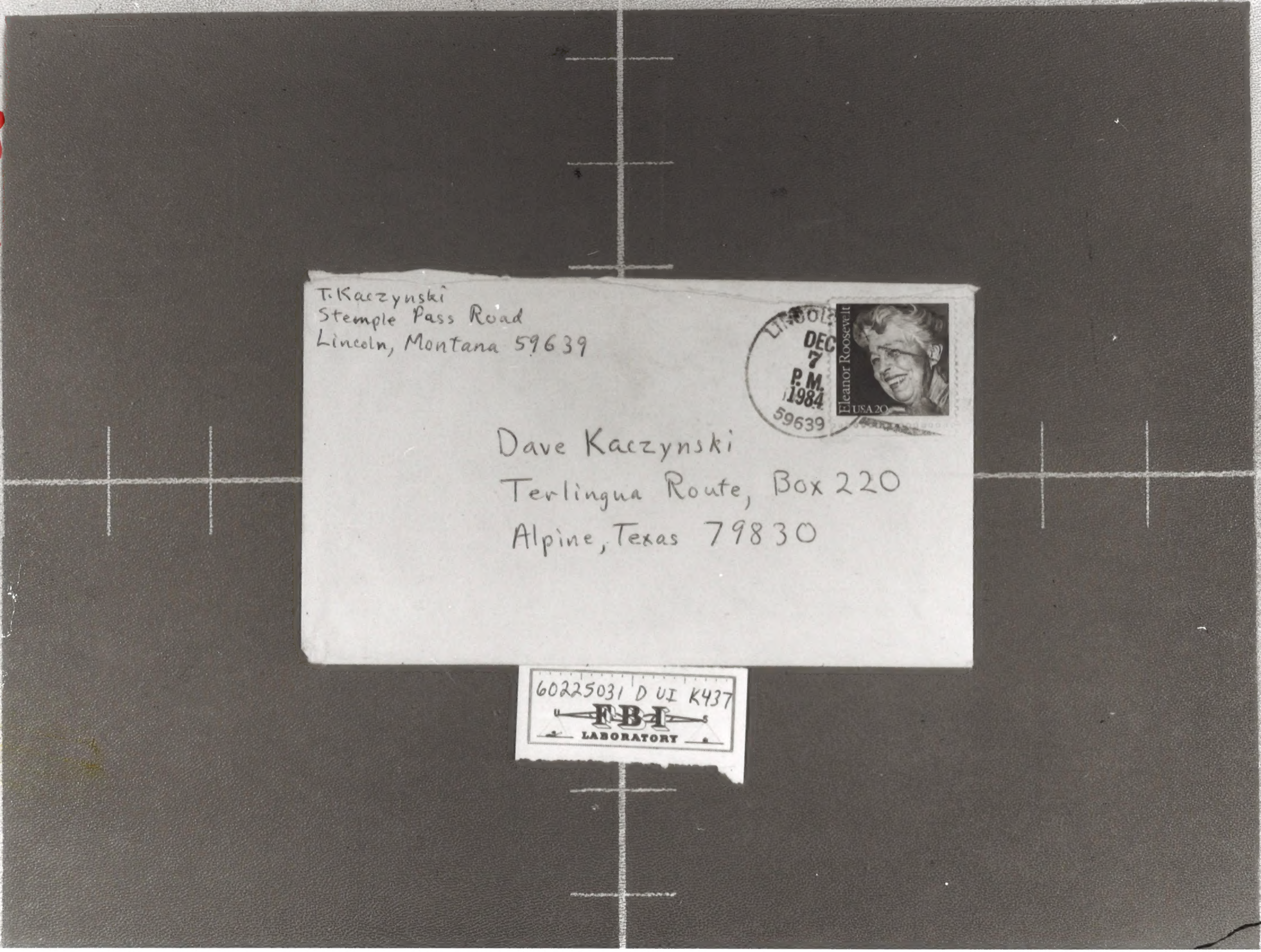
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Dear Dave:

By the way, in case you feel uncomfortable about the fact that you never got around to digging up any university newspapers for me, you needn't do so, because (1) you don't owe me any favors; (2) I realize it might have been a considerable inconvenience for you; (3) I got the addresses of a couple of university newspapers at the library and can handle the matter myself through correspondence.*

I look forward to hearing about your adventures in Mexico, when you get around to having them.

I'm glad you liked the Quiroga story. I found your interpretation of it interesting. On the other hand, I see no particular reason to believe that Quiroga had such an idea in mind when he wrote the story. It seems to me that if one is going to allow any value to that type of literary criticism, then it must be regarded as a kind of parasitic art form, that is, the "interpretation" of a literary work is an art work in itself based on another work of art. The critic puts forth the interpretation because of the appeal of the interpretation itself, and should not flatly assert that the story "means" such and such, or that the author intended to incorporate such and such a message.. Of course, there are some cases in which the author's intention is clear or can be fairly well demonstrated. But more often there are many reasonable interpretations of a story and there is no way of knowing which one, if any, was intended by the author.

Thank you for your compliments on the quality of the translation.

I have noticed the tendency to a certain ambiguity of

*I must admit, though, that I can't help feeling a little cynical about the contrast between the rather emotional offer you made a couple of years ago ("if I can ever help you in any way---" etc.) and the performance. You shouldn't make imprudent offers! But, as I said, you owe me nothing.

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ambiguity — of tone, of attitude, of meaning, or something — in Conrad's writing and also in a lot of other great literature, but I have not noticed that this is a prominent feature of Quiroga's writing. So in answer to your question, no, I haven't been aware of any similarity between Conrad and Quiroga.

In answer to your other questions — No, no interesting experiences. Harvest not as good as last year, but sufficient so that I am satisfied with it. As for interesting books, I've already mentioned in previous letters the 2 books by the ex-nazi Albert Speer (which I think would interest you) and the book by Ángel Ganivet from which I extracted some remarks on Ibsen.

More recently I've read an old (1887) book by Henry M. ("Doctor Livingstone I presume") Stanley, How I found Livingstone, which I came across in the little local library here in Lincoln. Here are some extracts:

Stanley felt it necessary to conceal the fact that the object of his expedition was to find Livingstone, because he was afraid that Livingstone did not want to be found and would absent himself if he heard of such an expedition:

p. 15. "What kind of a man is he [Livingstone] to get along with Doctor?" I asked, feeling now quite interested in his conversation.

"Well, I think he is a very difficult man to deal with generally. Personally, I have never had a quarrel with him, but I have seen him in hot water with fellows so often, and that is principally the reason, I think, he hates to have anyone with him.

"I am told he is a very modest man; is he?" I asked.

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"Oh, he knows the value of his own discoveries; no man better. He is not quite an angel," said he, with a laugh.

"Well now, supposing I met him in my travels—I might possibly stumble across him if he travels anywhere in the direction I am going — how would he conduct himself towards me?"

"To tell you the truth", said he, "I do not think he would like it very well. I know if Burton, or Grant, or Baker, or any of those fellows were going after him, and he heard of their coming, Livingstone would put a hundred miles of swamp in a very short time between himself and them. I do, upon my word I do."

p.430. It was reported, before I proceeded to Central Africa, that he [Livingstone] was married to an African princess.

Livingstone's personality seems to have made a deep and powerful impression on Stanley.

p.428. My feelings for him [Livingstone] are those of unqualified admiration.

p.622. March 13.— The last day of my stay with Livingstone has come and gone and the last night we shall be together is present, and I cannot evade the morrow! I feel as though I would rebel against the fate which drives me away from him.... How many times have I not suffered the pang of parting with friends! I wished to linger longer, but the inevitable would come — Fate sundered us. This is the same regretful feeling, only it is more poignant, and the farewell may be for ever. FOR EVER? And "FOR EVER" echo the reverbrations of a woeful whisper.

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That kind of emotive writing is by no means characteristic of the rest of the book.

There is a good deal in the book about slave-raiding by the Arabs, and about the wars and raids of the native Africans. Stanley makes mention somewhere — though I can't locate the passage just now — of seeing human skulls set up on posts as trophies.

Finally, note this passage:

pages 620 – 621: Tonight the natives have gathered themselves together to give me a farewell dance in front of my house. I find them to be the pagazis [carriers] of Singiri, chief of Mtesa's caravan. My men joined in, and, captivated by the music despite myself, I also struck in, and performed the "light fantastic" to the intense admiration of my braves, who were delighted to see their master unbend a little from his usual stiffness.

It is a wild dance altogether. The music is lively, and evoked from the sonorous sound of four drums, which are arranged before the bodies of four men, who stand in the center of the weird circle. Bombay, as ever comical, never so much at home as when in the dance of the Mrima, has my water-bucket on his head; Chowpereh — the sturdy, the nimble, sure-footed Chowpereh — has an axe in his hand, and wears a goatskin on his head; Baraka has my bearskin, and handles a spear; Mabruki, the "Bull-headed", has entered into the spirit of the thing, and steps up and down like a solemn elephant; Ulimengo has a gun, and is a fierce Drawcansir, and you would imagine he was

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about to do battle to a hundred thousand, so ferocious is he in appearance; Khamisi and Kamna are before the drummers, back to back, kicking up ambitiously at the stars; Asmani,— the embodiment of giant strength,— a towering titan,— has also a gun, with which he is dealing blows in the air, as if he were Thor, slaying myriads with his hammer. The scruples and passions of us all are in abeyance; we are contending demons under the heavenly light of the stars, enacting only the part of a weird drama, quickened into action and movement by the appalling energy and thunder of the drums.

Now, does all this remind you of something? Of a certain masterly short novel, perhaps? By Joseph Conrad? Such as Heart of Darkness? Compare the reputed African bride of Livingstone with Kurtz's "girlfriend" — the African one, not the European, of course.

Note how Kurtz's personality inspired vast admiration in certain people, especially the young Russian, whom Conrad describes as figuratively "crawling" before Kurtz, and compare Stanley's adulation of Livingstone — on p. 431 he goes so far as to say that it is impossible to find any fault in Dr. Livingstone's character.

Compare the wild dance described above with this passage from Heart of Darkness:

"As we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying.... The prehistoric man was

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cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us — who could tell? . . .
"Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you — you so remote from the night of first ages — could comprehend . . . Who's that grunting? You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? . . ."

Stanley took some donkeys along on his expedition; these were often ridden by the whites. But the donkeys all died along the way. The Eldorado Exploring Expedition mentioned in _Heart of Darkness_ took along donkeys, ridden by the whites. Later, word came that all the donkeys had died.

There is a lot of talk in Stanley's book about bringing the supposed advantages of learning and civilization to Africa. Kurz had aspired to bring "light" (i.e. civilization) to the wilderness.

Recall how the young Russian shows Marlow his dilapidated shoes and asks him if he can spare a pair. Stanley complains of how he and Livingstone had to stumble along in dilapidated shoes.

Somewhere in his book, Stanley mentions seeing human skulls set up on posts as trophies; compare the heads set up on posts in front of Kurz's house.

Stanley mentions shooting at hippopotami with a rifle, without the bullets' having any apparent effect. This he did as a casual pastime. In _Heart of Darkness_ the pilgrims empty their rifles ineffectually at a hippopotamus, for sport.

Kurz is represented as having established relations

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with "a lake tribe". Livingstone was exploring in a region of lakes.

Now, many of these comparisons are too general to have much weight. For instance, dilapidated shoes are only to be expected after a long sojourn in the wilderness, and other expeditions besides Stanley's may have taken donkeys that died.

Still, it is plausible to conjecture that Conrad may have been led by the case of Dr. Livingstone to imagine a man of character, intelligence, and impressive personality captivated by the spell of the wilderness so that he throws off the shackles of civilization.

I should explain at this point that Stanley found the rumors about Livingstone to be false: he had no African wife; rather than being difficult to get along with, he was, according to Stanley, a very mild-mannered and gentle man; and far from running away at Stanley's approach he was very glad to be found, especially since he was in serious difficulties at the time so that Stanley's arrival represented to some extent a rescue.

This, however, is beside the point, since there is no suggestion here that Conrad meant to portray Livingstone. The false rumors reported by Stanley could serve as an inspiration or source of ideas for Conrad just as well as if they were true.

You may recall a book from the Lombard Library that we read: The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, by Jerry Allen. This Miss Allen maintained that the case of a certain Major Barttelot was the inspiration for Heart of Darkness. I find her theory dubious. Barttelot,

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as far as I can remember, was merely brutal; he was not a man like Kurtz of character, ideas and ambition, captured by the spell of the wilderness. But the Barttelot case might possibly have suggested the Fresleven incident in Heart of Darkness. Barttelot was kicking a negro's wife when the latter, driven to desperation, dared to shoot him with a musket. Fresleven — Marlow's predecessor as captain of the steamboat — was beating an old negro when one of the villagers in desperation made a tentative jab at him (Fresleven) with a spear and found that it went in quite easily.

Of course, Conrad doubtless got ideas for _Heart of Darkness_ from many sources; first and foremost, I suppose, his own imagination. But if one were going to name anything as the "inspiration" for the tale, I would say that Stanley's book is a more plausible candidate than the Barttelot case.

Moreover, I can give a piece of evidence that Conrad did read Stanley's account.

From pp. 331 to 335 of Stanley's book. Stanley enters a locality that he calls Manyara. To the chief or sultan, and his accompanying subchiefs, Stanley shows them first his firearms, then his medicine chest. From the latter he gives them, first, a sample of medicinal brandy. Then (pp. 334-335): "I next produced a bottle of concentrated ammonia, which as I explained was for snake bites, and head-aches; the Sultan immediately complained that he had a head-ache, and must have a little. Telling him to close his eyes, I suddenly uncorked the bottle, and presented it to His Majesty's nose. The effect was magical,

60225031 D UI K437

for he fell back as if shot, and such contortions as his features underwent are indescribable. His chiefs roared with laughter, and clapped their hands, pinched each other, snapped their fingers, and committed many other ludicrous things.... Finally the Sultan recovered himself, great tears rolling down his cheeks, and his features quivering with laughter, then he slowly uttered the word 'Kali', — hot, strong, quick, or ardent medicine. He required no more, but the other chiefs pushed forward to get one wee whiff, which they no sooner had, than all went into paroxysms of uncontrollable laughter."

"This is the only place I have ever read of primitives getting a kick out of sniffing ammonia.

Compare Conrad, An Outpost of Progress: "Gobila was the chief of the neighboring villages.... These [white men] were his brothers, and he transferred his absurd affection to them. They returned it in a way. Carlier slapped him on the back, and recklessly struck off matches for his amusement. Kayerts was always ready to let him have a sniff at the ammonia bottle."

Of course, this is not conclusive proof that Conrad read Stanley's account — he could have heard of savages sniffing ammonia somewhere else — but I would call it strongly suggestive, anyway.

— Ted

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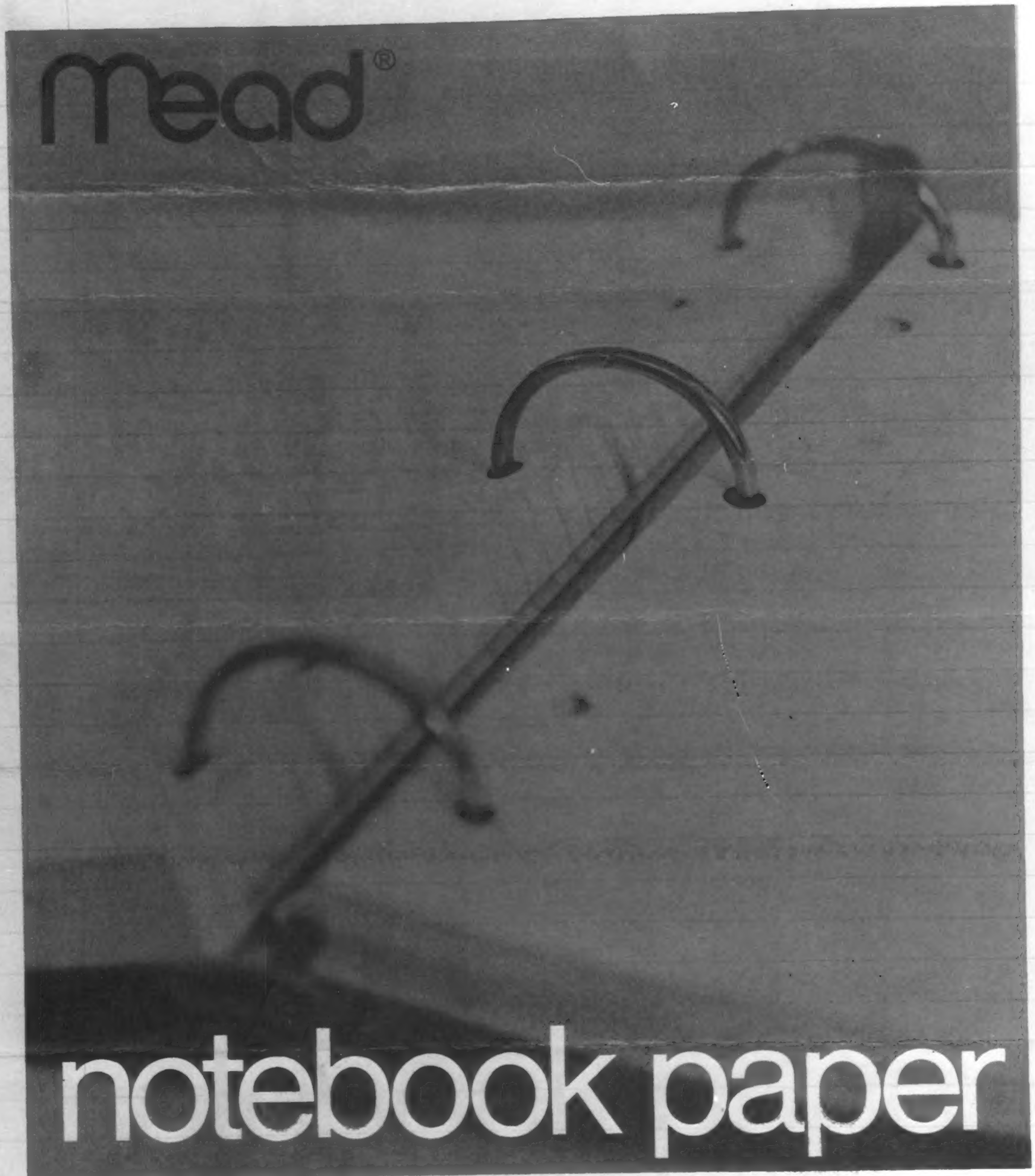

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